

2010 Annual Plastic Bag Recycling Report Update

City of Chicago Department of Environment

July 8, 2011

Introduction

Chapter 7-30 of the Municipal Code of Chicago requires that certain businesses implement a plastic carryout and film plastic recycling program. Specifically, this recycling program must include (i) labeling of plastic bags as recyclable, (ii) offering reusable bags to customers, (iii) providing collection bins for customers to return their bags, and (iv) recycling of all bags and other plastic film collected. Section 7-30-020(c) of the ordinance requires the affected businesses to submit an annual report to the Department of Environment (DOE) stating the weight of bags recycled, the location at which such recycling occurred and the cost for such efforts.

Section 7-30-020(d) requires DOE to develop a system to monitor, analyze and report this information back to the Joint Committee of the Committee on Finance and the Committee on Energy, Environmental Protection and Public Utilities every two years. This report is a summary of the information DOE collected for reporting year 2010, which is the second year reporting has been in effect.

Outreach

- Because 2009 was the first full year the ordinance was in effect, DOE focused on education rather than enforcement. As such, the reporting form allowed businesses to report to DOE why they couldn't comply with the ordinance. This option was removed from the form for 2010.
- In January 2011, DOE mailed out the revised 2010 annual reporting form and a letter explaining the ordinance requirements to 4,321 businesses potentially affected by this ordinance. DOE worked with both the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection and a mailing list company to develop the list of businesses potentially affected by this ordinance.
- DOE posted the reporting information on City's website at the same time as the mailing.
- DOE provided a dedicated hotline and answered over 90 phone calls from businesses with questions and concerns.

Report Results

DOE received responses for 1,438 business locations and an additional 232 reports were returned to DOE unopened and marked as "return to sender." Responses were generally grouped into eight categories, which are summarized in Table 1. Table 2 summarizes the responses for the 447 businesses that reported recycling plastic bags and/or film in 2010 and compares them to 2009.

Table 1
Summary of Report Responses

Report Response Category	Number of Business Locations Reported		Percent of Total	
	2010	2009	2010	2009
1. Reported 0 lbs of plastic bags and/or film recycled ^a	486	95	29%	6%
2. Reported with weight of plastic bags and film recycled ^a	447	404	27%	7%
3. Did not meet the definition of 'store' in ordinance	117	128	7%	9%
4. Could not comply with ordinance ^b	0	223	0%	15%
5. Did not hand out plastic bags to customers	371	307	22%	15%

Report Response Category	Number of Business Locations Reported		Percent of Total	
	2010	2009	2010	2009
6. Incorrectly completed/questionable response	15	109	1%	21%
7. Out of Business	232	219	14%	27%
8. Non-deliverable	4	0	0%	0%
Total	1,672	1,485	100%	100%

^a In 2010, this includes reports that were both notarized and not notarized.

^b This was not an option on the 2010 form.

^c In 2010, incorrectly completed does not include businesses that reported correctly but did not notarize. In 2009, these reports were included in this category.

The biggest difference from 2009 to 2010 is the increase in number of businesses reporting that they did not recycle any plastic bags, which went from 95 to 486. Based on phone calls and report entries, the primary reason for this was that although businesses placed a container in their store, customers did not return plastic bags. The primary reason for the decrease in incorrectly completed reports is that unlike in 2009, reports that were filled out correctly but not notarized were included in Categories 1, 2 or 3 rather than in Category 6. This was change was made to get a more accurate total of plastic bag recycling by using data reported by businesses filled out the report correctly but didn't notarize it.

Similar to 2009, the maximum amount reported in 2010 (Jewel Foods) is a business with multiple store locations across Chicago and accounts for 47% of the total weight reported. In addition, almost 90% of the plastic reported as recycled was from only five companies (Dominick's, Jewel Foods, Trader Joe's, Walgreens, and GM Warehouse), all of which were either large-footprint stores and/or have multiple locations in Chicago. In 2010, three businesses returned reports indicating that they reuse the plastic bags that are returned to them. These three businesses (with four locations) account for approximately 141 pounds (less than .01%) of bags that were reused in 2010.

Although the maximum weight recycled by one business decreased in 2010, the total amount of plastic bags and filmed recycled (or reused) increased by almost 20%. Reported costs in 2010 were similar to 2009.

Table 2
Reported Amounts of Plastic Bags and/or Film Recycled and/or Reused

	Weight (lbs)		Cost (\$)	
	2010	2009	2010	2009
Minimum reported	1	1	\$0	\$0
Maximum reported	584,455	626,515	\$30,180	\$27,125
Average per store	2,771	2,559	\$229	\$317
Total	1,238,828	1,033,698	\$102,069	\$127,517

Recommendations for 2011 Reporting Year

- As noted above, several businesses stated that they did not have any plastic bags returned by customers. This should be added as a specific option on next year's form.
- Confusion still exists regarding which type of businesses this ordinance applies to. Specific examples of stores could be provided in the cover letter and/or on the form.
- The notarization requirement is still not being honored by businesses. This should continue to be called out both in the cover letter and on the form.